

Message Text

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ACTION AF-04

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R 171457Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2097

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 1687

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LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS-3
TAGS: BEXP, IV
SUBJ: LANG AFRIQUE/SODESUCRE CONFLICT

REF: (A) STATE 034595, (B) ABIDJAN 1479

1. EMBASSY CONCURS IN MORSE'S OPINION THAT ARBITRATION OF DISPUTE WOULD NOT RPT NOT BE IN INTEREST OF ANY PARTY INVOLVED, INCLUDING THAT OF USG. EMBASSY ALSO BELIEVES THERE IS A LIMIT TO WHICH ISC CAN THREATEN ARBITRATION TO OBTAIN BETTER SETTLEMENT. PRECISE JUDGMENT, HOWEVER, EMBASSY LEAVES TO MORSE AND ISC. PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY MAY BE EXERTING PRESSURE ON TORCZYNER TO SETTLE. MARION WRIGHT, LAST LANG AFRIQUE OFFICIAL TO DEPART IVORY COAST, LEFT EMBASSY WITH DEFINITE IMPRESSION THAT REAL SETTLEMENT WOULD TAKE PLACE IN NEW YORK WITH FORMAL COSMETIC RESOLUTION OF DISPUTE TAKING PLACE IN ABIDJAN SHORTLY THEREAFTER. EMBASSY DOES NOT KNOW SOURCE OF WRIGHT'S INFORMATION. AS AMBASSADOR STATED IN REF B, WE ARE HOPEFUL DIAWARA WILL SEE MORSE IN NEW YORK THIS WEEK.

2. ON THE FACE OF IT, EMBASSY IS NOT KEEN ABOUT ISC
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PRESENTING A 350 MILLION DOLLAR PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTHERN REGION. ISC, THROUGH ITS LANG SUBSIDIARY, HAS A POOR REPUTATION IN IVORY COAST, RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY, AND EMBASSY BELIEVES IT IS BEST TO OBTAIN A SETTLEMENT AND LEAVE WELL ENOUGH ALONE. IVORY COAST WOULD BE UNLIKELY TO SIGN SUCH A CONTRACT WITH ISC IN ANY EVENT.

REGARDING OFFER TO PARTICIPATE IN "SUPPOSEDLY PROFITABLE" PULP AND PAPER PROJECT, EMBASSY NOTES THAT GOIC HAS BEEN LOOKING FOR TWO YEARS FOR INVESTORS IN THEIS PROJECT WITH NO TAKERS.

5. RESPONDING TO MORSE'S SPECIFIC QUESTIONS IN PARA FIVE: (A) THE MINISTERS INVOLVED AND KIGBAFORY HAVE DIFFERING VIEWS ON THE DISPUTE. SAWADOGO AND DIAWARA, THOUGH CRITICAL OF LANG, ARE PROBABLY MOST DISPOSED TO COMPROMISE, WHILE BEDIE AND KIGBAFORY ARE INCLINED TO BE HARDLINERS. ALTHOUGH THERE MAY BE SOME RIVALRY BETWEEN MINISTERS "POWER PLAYS" ARE UNLIKELY. PRESIDENT, IN ANY EVENT, WOULD IMMEDIATELY SQUASH A POWER PLAY. MINISTERS AND KIGBAFORY MIGHT TEND TO BE CAUTIOUS, UNABLE TO AGREE ON TERMS OF SETTLEMENT, BUT IF PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET IS DISPOSED TO SETTLE DISPUTE AND TERMS ARE REASONABLE, IT WILL BE SETTLED. (B) THE MILL IS OPERATING VERY WELL, AND ACCORDING TO SODESUCRE AND OFFICIALS WHOM AMBASSADOR MET AT FERKE I, ABOUT 35,000 MT OF SUGAR WILL BE REFINED THIS SEASON, A RESPECTABLE FIGURE FOR THE THIRD CAMPAIGN. EMBASSY HAS HEARD NO RECENT COMPLAINTS ABOUT MAINTENANCE. MOREOVER, SODESUCRE NOT LANG IS NOW OPERATING MILL. THOUGH EMBASSY IS UNCLEAR WHETHER LANG STILL HAS SOME MAINTENANCE RESPONSIBILITIES ASSOCIATED WITH INITIAL CONSTRUCTION.

4. DEPARTMENT MAY PASS ALL THE ABOVE TO MORSE ON CONFIDENTIAL BASIS, NOT FOR ATTRIBUTION TO EMBASSY
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OR DEPARTMENT, EXCEPT THAT MARION WRIGHT'S NAME SHOULD NOT BE MENTIONED. HE OVERSTATED LANG'S CASE TO GOIC, AMONG OTHER JUDGMENTAL ERRORS (PERHAPS ACTING UNDER ORDERS FROM HIS SUPERIORS), BUT THE UPSHOT WAS THAT HE WAS EXCLUDED FROM SUBSEQUENT TALKS BETWEEN ISC AND GOIC. MORSE SHOULD BE INFORMED THAT GOIC WILL BE FULLY OCCUPIED PLAYING HOST TO ROMANIAN PRESIDENT CEAUSESCU FROM FEBRUARY 27 THROUGH MARCH 2. IF FEBRUARY MEDIATION EFFORTS DO NOT PRODUCE SETTLEMENT, THIS MIGHT NOT BE PROPITIOUS IMDO TO INFORM HOUPHOUET.
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